

IMAGINATION¹

BY GORDON HALL GEROULD

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AS I gave my coat and hat to the boy, I caught sight of Orrington, waddling into the farther reaches of the club just ahead of me. "Here's luck!" I thought to myself, and with a few hasty strides overtook him.

It is always good luck to run upon Harvey Orrington during the hour when he is loafing before dinner. In motion he resembles a hippopotamus, and in repose he produces the impression that the day is very hot, even in midwinter. But one forgets his red and raw corpulency when he has settled at ease in a big chair and begun to talk. Then the qualities that make him the valuable man he is, as the literary adviser of the Speedwell Company, come to the surface, and with them those perhaps finer attributes that have given him his reputation as a critic. Possibly the contrast between his Falstaffian body and his nicely discriminating mind gives savor to his comment on art and life; but in any case his talk is as good in its way as his essays are in theirs. Read his "Retrospective Impressions" if you wish to know what I mean — only don't think that his colloquial diction is like the fine-spun phrasing of his essays. He inclines to be slangy in conversation.

I overtook Orrington, as I say, before he had reached his accustomed corner, and I greeted him with a becoming deference. He is fifteen years my senior, after all.

"Hello," he said, turning his rather dull eyes full upon me. "Chasing will-o'-the-wisps this afternoon?"

"I've been pursuing you. If you call that —"

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"Precision forbids! It can't have been will-o'-the-wisps." Orrington shook his head with utter solemnity. "I don't know just what their figure is, but I'm sure it's not like mine. Come along and save my life, won't you?"

"With pleasure. I hoped you might be free."

"Free as the air of a department-store elevator — yes. I've got to meet Reynolds here. He's waiting for me yonder. You know Reynolds?"

"Yes, I know him."

Every one knows Reynolds, I need hardly say — every one who can compass it. The rest of the world knows his books. Reynolds makes books with divine unconcern and profuseness: almost as a steel magnate makes steel. He makes them in every kind, and puts them out with a fine flourish, so that he is generally regarded as master of all the literary arts. People buy his output, too, which is lucky for Reynolds but perhaps less fortunate for literature; they buy his output — that is the only word to use — by the boxful, apparently. An edition in his sight is but as the twinkling of an eye before it is sold out. One can't wonder that Reynolds is a little spoiled by all this, though he must have been a good fellow to begin with. He's really a kind-hearted and brave man now, but he takes himself too seriously. He is sometimes a bore. Only that he would never recognize the portrait I am making of him, I should hardly dare to say what I am saying. Physically, he is undistinguished: he looks like a successful lawyer of a dark athletic type who has kept himself fit with much golf and who has got the habit of wearing his golfing-clothes to town. It is his manner that sets him apart from his fellows.

"I'm glad you know him." Orrington chuckled as we drew near the corner where Reynolds was already seated. "I'd hate to be the innocent cause of your introduction."

Reynolds rose and extended gracious hands to the two of us. "You add to my pleasure by bringing our friend," he said to Orrington.

I fear that I acknowledged the compliment by looking foolish. It was Orrington's corner that we were invading, if it was any one's, and, in any case, Reynolds does n't own the club.

"I need tea to support my anæmia," said Orrington gruffly. "If the rest of you wish strong drink, however, I'm not unwilling to order it. They've got a new lot of extremely old Bourbon, I am informed, that had to be smuggled out of Kentucky at dead of night for fear of a popular uprising. I should like to watch the effect of it on one or both of you."

"I'm willing to be the subject of the experiment," I said. "What about you, Reynolds?"

Reynolds cocked his head slightly to one side. "Though I dislike to deprive our good friend of any æsthetic pleasure, I think I will stick to my own special Scotch. I do not crave the dizzy heights of inebriety."

"First time I ever knew you to be afraid of soaring, Reynolds," commented Orrington. "I trust you won't let caution affect your literary labors. It is one of the biggest things about you, you know, that you aren't afraid to tackle any job you please. Most of us wait about, wondering whether we could ever learn to manage the Pegasus biplane, but you fly in whatever machine is handy."

"Perhaps you think I adventure rashly." It was neither question nor positive statement on the part of Reynolds, but a little compounded of both. He seemed hurt.

"Not at all." Orrington's tone was heartily reassuring. "You get away with it, and the rest of us get nowhere in comparison."

"I have always believed," said Reynolds, "that a proper self-confidence is a prime requisite for literary success. In all seriousness, I am sure both of you will agree with me that none of us could have reached his present position in the world without some degree of boldness. We have seized the main chance."

"Then it got away from me," I felt impelled to say. I could see no reason for accepting the flattery that Reynolds intended.

"You may believe it or not, as you please, Reynolds, but I'm incapable of seizing anything." Orrington paused to direct the waiter, but went on after a moment, with a teacup in his fat hand. "As a matter of fact, I've

never collared anything in my life except a few good manuscripts. Some mighty bad ones, too." He chuckled.

"Ah! You know the difference between the good and the bad better than any one else in the country, I fancy. I always feel diffident when I send copy to you." Reynolds somehow conveyed the impression, rather by his manner than by his words, of insufferable conceit. He made you certain that he was ready to challenge the assembly of the Immortals in behalf of anything he wrote.

"Oh, you're in a position to dictate. It's not for us to criticise," Orrington answered very quietly. "By the way, I ventured to suggest our meeting here partly because I wished to know when your new book would be ready. Speedwell's been worrying, and I told him I'd see you. Thought it would bother you less than a letter or coming round to the office."

"My book!" Reynolds struck an attitude and wrinkled his forehead. "My dear fellow, I wish I knew."

Orrington set down his cup and looked at Reynolds quizzically. "You must know better than anybody else."

"It's a question of the possibilities only." Reynolds lifted his head proudly. "I will not fail you, Orrington. I have never yet left any one in the lurch, but I have been exceedingly busy of late. You can't realize the pressure I am under from every side. So many calls—my time, my presence, my words! I must have a fortnight's clear space to get my copy ready for you. Within the month, I feel sure, you shall have it."

"That'll do perfectly well. We don't wish to bother you," said Orrington briefly, "but you know as well as I do that the public cries for you. Speedwell gets restive if he can't administer a dose once in so often."

"What is the book to be?" I ventured to ask.

Reynolds bridled coquettishly. It was too absurd of a fellow with his physique and general appearance: I had difficulty in maintaining a decent gravity. "My book!" he said again. "It is n't precisely a novel, and it is n't precisely anything else. It is a simple story with perhaps a cosmic significance."

"I see." I did n't, of course, but I could n't well say

less. I knew, besides, pretty well what the book would be like. I had read two or three of Reynolds's things. The mark of the beast was on them all, though variously imprinted.

"By the way of nothing," said Orrington suddenly, "I had an odd experience to-day."

"Ah! do tell us," urged Reynolds. "Your experiences are always worth hearing. I suppose it is because your impressions are more vivid than those of most men."

Orrington pursed his mouth deprecatingly and lighted a cigarette. "There's no stuff for you fellows in this. You couldn't make a story out of it if you tried. But it gave me a twinge and brought back something that happened twenty years ago."

"What happened to-day?" I asked, to get the story properly begun.

"Oh, nothing much, in one way. I've been talking with a young chap who has sent us a manuscript lately. The book's no good, commercially — a pretty crude performance — but it has some striking descriptive passages about the effects of hunger on the human body and the human mind. They interested me because I thought they showed some traces of imagination. There isn't much real imagination lying round loose, you know: nothing but the derived and Burbankized variety. So I sent for the fellow. He came running, of course. Hope in his eye, and all that sort of thing. I felt like a brute beast to have to tell him we couldn't take his book, though I coated the pill as sweetly as I could.

"He took it like a Trojan, though I could see that he was holding himself in to keep from crying. He was a mere boy, mind you, and a very shabby and lean one. I noticed that while I talked encouragingly to him, and I finally asked what set him going at such a rate about starvation. I might have known, of course! The kid has been up against it and has been living on quarter rations for I don't know how many months. There was n't an ounce of imagination in his tale, after all: he had been describing his own sensations with decent accuracy — nothing more than that."

"Poor fellow!" I interrupted. "We ought to find him

some sort of job. Do you think he'd make good if he had a chance?"

Orrington shrugged his heavy shoulders. "I don't know, I'm sure. I talked to him like a father and uncle and all his elderly relations, and I asked more questions than was polite. He's in earnest at the moment, anyhow."

"But if he's actually starving—" I began.

Orrington looked at me in his sleepy way. "Oh, he's had a good feed by this time. You must take me for a cross between a devil-fish and a blood-sucking bat. I could at least afford the luxury of seeing that he should n't try to do the Chatterton act."

Reynolds took a sip of whiskey, then held up his glass to command attention. "Dear, dear!" he said slowly, with the air of settling the case. "It's a very great pity that young men without resources and settled employment try to make their way by writing. They ought not to be encouraged to do so. Most of them would be better off in business or on their fathers' farms, no doubt; and the sooner they find their place, the better."

"Still, if nobody made the venture," I objected, "the craft would n't flourish, would it? I think the question is whether something can't be done to give this particular young man a show."

"I've sent him to Dawbarn," said Orrington almost sullenly. "He wants a space-filler and general utility man, he happened to tell me yesterday. It's a rotten job, but it will seem princely to my young acquaintance. I shall watch him. He might make good and pay back my loan, you know."

"It does credit to your heart, my dear Orrington—grub-staking him and getting him a job at once." Reynolds frowned judicially. "I doubt the wisdom of it, however. A young man ought to succeed by his own efforts or not at all. Of course I know nothing of this particular case except what you've just told us, but I can't see from your account of him that he has much chance to lift himself out of the ranks of unsuccessful hack writers. You admit that he shows little imagination."

"Not yet; but he does n't write badly."

"Ah! there are so many who don't write badly, but who never go beyond that."

Orrington laughed, shaking even his heavy chair with his heavier mirth. "Excuse me," he murmured. "You're very severe on us, Reynolds. You must n't forget that most of us are n't Shakespeares. Indeed, to be strictly impersonal, I don't know any member of this club—and we're rather long on eminent pen-pushers—who is. It won't do any harm to give my young friend his chance. To tell the truth, I think it's a damned sight better for him than the end of a pier and the morgue."

I wondered how the mighty Reynolds would take the snub, and I feared a scene. But I knew him less well than Orrington. He merely nursed his glass in silence and looked sulky. After all, Orrington's argument was unanswerable.

To break the tension, I turned to Orrington with a question. "What happened twenty years ago?" I asked. "You said you were reminded of it."

Orrington was silent for a minute as if deliberating. He seemed to be reviewing whatever it was he had in mind. "Yes, yes," he said at last, "that's more of a story, only it has n't any conclusion. It's as devoid of a *dénouement* as the life-history of the youth whom Reynolds wishes to starve for his soul's good."

"You are very unjust to me," Reynolds protested. "You speak as if I had a grudge against the young man, whereas I was merely making a general observation. It is no real kindness to encourage a youth to his ultimate hurt."

Orrington looked at him doubtfully. "I suppose not," he said after a moment's pause. "I've often wondered what happened in this other case I have in mind."

"What was it?" asked Reynolds.

"It was a small matter," Orrington began apologetically; "at least I suppose it would seem so to any outsider. But it was a big thing to me and presumably to the other fellow involved. I never knew anything about him, directly."

"I thought you said you had dealings with the other man," I interjected.

"I did," said Orrington, "but I never met him. It was this way. I was editing a cheap magazine at the time, the kind of thing that intends to be popular and is n't. The man who published it was on his uppers, the wretched magazine was at death's door, and I was getting about half of my regular stipend when I got anything at all—something like forty cents a week, if I remember correctly. I was young, of course, so all that did n't so much matter. I was rather proud of being a real editor, even of a cheap and nasty thing like—but never mind the name. It died many years ago and was forgotten even before the funeral. I suspect now that the publisher took advantage of my youth and inexperience, but I bear him no grudge. I managed to keep afloat, and I liked it.

"Of course I had to live a double life in order to get enough to eat—a blameless double life that meant all work and no play. A fellow can do that in his twenties. After office hours I got jobs of hack writing, and occasionally I sold some little thing to one of the reputable magazines. It was hard sledding, though—a fact I emphasize not because my biography is interesting, but because it has its bearing on the incident in question.

"Well, one fine day I got hold of a job that was the best I'd ever landed. I suspect I apostrophized it, in the language of that era, as a 'peach.' It was hack work, of course, but hack work of a superior and exalted kind—the special article sort of thing. I went higher than a kite when I found the chance was coming my way. I dreamed dreams of opulence. Good Lord! I even looked forward to getting put up for this ill-run club which we are now honoring by our gracious presences."

Orrington stopped and shook with silent laughter till he had to wipe his eyes. The joke seemed less good to me than to him, for I had been only six months a member of the club and had not yet acquired the proper Olympian disdain of it. Reynolds smiled. I fancy that he still regards the club as of importance. In spite of his vast renown, he is never quite easy in his dignity.

"One has no business to laugh at the enthusiasms of youth," Orrington went on presently. "I suppose it's bad manners to laugh even at one's own, for we're not the same creatures we were back there. It's a temptation sometimes, all the same. And I was absurdly set up, I assure you, by my chance to do something of no conceivable importance at a quite decent figure. But I never did the job, after all."

He nodded his head slowly, as if he had been some fat god of the Orient suddenly come to torpid life.

"You don't mean that you came near starving?" I asked incredulously. 'The pattern of the story seemed to be getting confused.

"No, no. I was n't so poor as that, even though I gave up the rich job I'm telling you about. The point is that I was chronically hard up and needed the money. I could n't afford to do without it, but I had to. It was like this, you see. On the very day the plum dropped into my mouth, a story came into the office that bowled me over completely. I had n't much experience then; but I felt somehow sure that this thing was n't fiction at all, though it had a thin cloak of unreality flung about it. It was a cheerful little tale, the whole point of which was that the impossible hero killed himself rather than starve to death. It was very badly done in every respect, as far as I remember, but it gave me the unpleasant impression that the man who wrote it knew more about going without his dinner than about writing short stories. Of course I could n't accept the thing for my magazine, though I could take most kinds of drivel. Our readers did n't exist, to be sure, but we thought they demanded bright, sunshiny rubbish. I used to fill up our numbers with saccharine mush, and I should n't have dared print a gloomy story even if it had been good.

"This was n't good. It was punk. But it bothered me—just as the youngster's book has been bothering me lately. I suppose I'm too indiscriminating and sentimental for the jobs I've had in life."

"You!" Reynolds objected. "Every one's afraid of you. Haven't I said that I tremble, even now, when I send copy to you? It makes no difference that I have

the contract signed and every business arrangement concluded."

Orrington's mouth twisted into a little grimace. "That's merely my pose, Reynolds, as you know perfectly well. I'm the terror of the press because I have to be to hold my job. Inside I'm a welter of adipose sentiment. My physical exterior doesn't belie me. While dining, I quite prefer to think of all the world as well fed; and, in spite of many years' training, I can't see anything delightful in the spectacle of a fellow going without his dinner because he's ambitious. As a rule, I prefer to discourage authors who are millionaires. That's a pleasant game in itself, but not very good hunting. All of which is beside the point.

"I did hate, as a matter of fact, to turn down the little story I speak of; and while I was writing a gentle note that tried to explain, but didn't, I had a brilliant idea. I suppose I was the victim of what is known as a generous impulse. I've had so little to do with that sort of thing that I can't be sure of naming it correctly, but I dare say it could be described in that way. I said to myself: 'That son of a gun could do those special articles just as well as I can, and it's dollars to doughnuts he'll go under if he doesn't get something to do before long.'

"If you've ever had anything to do with generous impulses, you know that they're easier to come by than to put into practice. When I began to think what I should lose by turning over my job to the other fellow, I balked like an overloaded mule. After all, how could I be sure that the man was n't fooling me? He might have imagined everything he had written, after eating too much *pâté de foie gras*. I should be a fool to give a leg up to somebody who was already astride his beast. I could n't afford to do it. You know how one's mind would work."

"I regret to say," I put in, "that I can see perfectly how my mind would have worked. It would have persuaded me that I had a duty to myself."

Orrington laughed quietly. "Don't you believe it. Your conscience or your softness — whatever you choose to call it — would have played the deuce with your peace of mind. Mine did. I tore up my note and went out

for a walk. Naturally I saw nothing but beggars and poverty: misery stalked me from street to street. I wriggled and squirmed for half a day or more, but I couldn't get away from the damnable necessities of the story-writer.

"In the end I wrote him, of course—the flattering note I had intended, and something more. I told him about my fat job and said I was recommending him for it. By the same mail I wrote to the people who'd offered me the chance, refusing it. I said I regretted that I couldn't undertake the commission as I had expected, but that I found my other engagements made it impossible. I thought I might as well do the thing in grand style and chuck a bluff while I was about it. I added that I was sending a friend to them who would do the articles better than I could hope to. I didn't give the fellow's name, but I told them he'd turn up shortly."

"What happened then?" I asked, for Orrington lighted another cigarette and seemed inclined to rest on his oars.

He turned his dull eyes on me and smiled a little sadly. "What happened? Why, nothing much, as far as I know. I suppose the other fellow got my job and saved his body alive. I never inquired. I somehow expected that he'd write to me or come to see me—he had my address, you know—but he never did. I was a little annoyed, I remember, at his not doing so after I'd cut off my nose for him, which is probably why I never tried to follow him up. I never even looked up the articles when they were published. But I've often wished I might meet the man and learn how he got on."

"You've never seen his name?" I inquired. "He can't have done much, or you'd have spotted him."

"I suspect," said Orrington, "that he sent in that story of his under a pseudonym and that he may have done very well for himself since. What do you think, Reynolds? I suppose you consider me a fool for my pains, on the theory that no man ought to be helped out."

Reynolds had been silent for some time. As I looked at him now I could see that he was a good deal impressed

by Orrington's narrative. I was n't surprised, for I knew him to be a generous fellow in spite of his foibles.

"Yes, how about it, Reynolds?" I said.

"It is a very affecting story," he answered. "You acted most generously, Orrington, though you make light of it. I can't believe that the young man realized the sacrifice you made for him; otherwise his failure to thank you, bad enough in any case, would be unspeakable. He can't have known."

"But you insist that I'd better have let him alone," persisted Orrington, clearly with the intention of teasing our magnificent acquaintance.

"That depends altogether on how it turned out, does n't it? You can't tell us whether the young man was worth saving or not."

Orrington laughed contentedly. "No. That's the missing conclusion, but I'm not sorry to have given him a show. Besides, what I did was n't such a noble sacrifice, after all. Having basked in your admiration for a moment, I can afford to tell you. I'm not an accomplished hypocrite, and I'd hate to begin at my age. Let me tell you what happened."

I felt aggrieved. Had Orrington been working on our feelings for his private amusement merely? "You said there was n't any conclusion," I growled.

"Don't get huffy," Orrington returned imperturbably. "The story has n't any ending, as I warned you. Only my part in it turned out rather amusingly. I hope I should n't be fatuous ass enough to brag about the incident if there were anything in it that demanded bouquets. I suspect the bubble of noble actions often bursts just as mine did."

"What do you mean?" asked Reynolds—reasonably enough, I thought.

"Only this," Orrington went on. "It turned out that the people who had offered to let me do the articles were tremendously impressed by my turning them down. The letter I wrote them must have been a corker. Somehow or other they got the notion that I was a very busy man and a person of importance. They ought to have known better, of course, but they evidently adopted that silly

idea. They talked about me to their friends and cracked me up as a coming man. The upshot of it was that I began to be tempted with most flattering offers of one sort and another—before long I had my choice of several things. My self-constituted backers were rather powerful in those days, so it was useful to be in their good books. I left my moribund magazine and got so prosperous that I began to grow fat at once. Serene obscurity has been my lot ever since; and I've never got rid of the fat."

"That's a happy ending," I remarked lazily. "It's very like a real conclusion. What more do you want?"

"Oh, for the sake of argument, I'd like to prove that I was right and that Reynolds's theory is all wrong."

"I'm exceedingly glad that it turned out so well for you," said Reynolds unctuously. "Then the young man whom you assisted didn't need to feel quite so much under obligation to you as we've been thinking?"

I was outraged. Reynolds was a great gun in literature, at least in the opinion of himself and a huge circle of readers. He was also a dozen years older than I. At the same time, I couldn't allow him to disparage what Orrington had done, merely because Orrington made light of it.

"You will observe," I said with some heat, "that the effect on Orrington was purely secondary and fortuitous. Orrington didn't know he could possibly gain by it when he took the bread out of his own mouth to feed the young cur. I hope, for my part, that the fellow eventually starved to death or took to digging ditches."

Reynolds sat up very straight. His black eyes snapped with anger. "He didn't," he burst out. "I happen to know him."

"You know him!" I exclaimed, while Orrington goggled.

"Yes." Reynolds had grown very red, but he looked defiant. "Since I've been attacked like this, I may as well tell you. Not that I think it's anybody's business but my own. Orrington didn't suffer by what he did."

"You don't mean—" I began.

"I mean just what I say — no less and no more. I was the man in question, and I admit that I ought to have thanked Orrington for his kindness. I meant to, of course; but I set to work at once on those articles that have assumed such importance in our discussion, and I was very busy. I had to make them as good as I knew how. I assumed, naturally, that I had merely received a useful tip from a man who didn't care for the job. I've always assumed that till this afternoon. I wanted the job badly, myself."

"Oh, well!" Orrington put in soothingly. "It doesn't matter, does it? I've explained that the incident really set me on my feet. You don't owe me anything, Reynolds. If I'd been a complete pig and kept the chance for myself, I'd probably have been much worse off for it. You needed it much more than I did, evidently."

To my surprise, Reynolds was not quieted by Orrington's magnanimous speech. Instead, he jumped up in a passion and stood before us, clinching and unclenching his fists like a small boy before his first fight.

"That isn't the point," he said in a voice so loud that various groups of men scattered about the room looked toward us with amusement. "I admit that I was glad of the opportunity to do the articles, but I was by no means in such straits as you suppose. So much for the critical sense for which you have such a reputation!" He turned on Orrington with a sneer.

Orrington remained very calm. He seemed in no wise disturbed by the fury of Reynolds's tirade, nor by his insufferable rudeness, but puffed at a cigarette two or three times before he replied. "It's a poor thing, critical sense," he murmured. "I've never been proud of what mine has done for me. But you must admit that I paid you a pretty compliment, Reynolds, in believing that your story was founded on real experience. I don't see why you need mind my saying that it wasn't much of a yarn. Nobody need be sensitive about something he did twenty years back."

"I don't care a hang what you thought about the story then, or what you think of it now," Reynolds snapped. "You might, however, grant the existence of imagina-

tion. You need n't attribute everything anybody writes to actual experience. I never went hungry."

So that was where the shoe pinched! Reynolds insisted on being proud of his prosperity at all stages. I laughed. "You've missed something, then," I put in. "The sensation, if not agreeable, is unique. Every man should feel it once, in a way. A couple of times I've run short of provisions, and I assure you the experience is like nothing else."

"That's different," said Reynolds a little more quietly. "I'm not saying that I owe nothing to Orrington. I acknowledge that I do, and I admit that I ought to have acknowledged it twenty years ago. I was anxious at the time to get a start in the world of letters, and I was looking for an opening. Orrington's suggestion gave me my first little opportunity; but it certainly did n't save my life."

"Then it was all imagination, after all," Orrington said gently. "What a mistake I made!"

"Of course it was all imagined!" Reynolds protested, and he added naively: "I was living at home at the time, and I had a sufficient allowance from my father."

A twinkle crept into Orrington's usually expressionless eyes. "I must apologize to you, Reynolds, or perhaps to your father, for so mistaking the circumstances of your youth. You have, at all events, lived down the opprobrium of inherited wealth. You've supported yourself quite nicely ever since I've known you."

"As I remarked earlier," Reynolds went on pompously, but in better humor, "I have never thought it wise for young men to embark on the literary life without sufficient means to live in comfort until they can establish their reputations. In my own case I should never have undertaken to do so."

His declaration of principle seemed to restore him to complete self-satisfaction, and it must have seemed to him the proper cue for exit. As he was already standing, he was in a position to shake hands with Orrington and me rather condescendingly; and he took himself off with the swagger of conscious invincibility. I think he bore us no malice.

Orrington looked at me and raised his eyebrows. "I told you I needed you to save my life," he said. "I had n't any notion, though, that this kind of thing would happen. I'm sorry to have let you in for such a scene."

"Oh, I don't mind," I answered. "It has been rather amusing and — well — illuminating."

Orrington chuckled. "The devil tempted me, and I did n't resist him unduly. As a matter of fact, it has been quite as illuminating to me as to you. I've been wishing for a dozen or fifteen years to try out the experiment."

"What experiment?" I was puzzled.

"Oh, putting it up to Reynolds, of course. I've wondered why he did it and why he did n't do it and, moreover, how he did it."

"If you got light on a complication like that, you did better than I did. Do you mind explaining?"

"Reynolds has explained sufficiently, has n't he? Of course I knew long ago that he faked his story, but —"

"Then you knew it was Reynolds?" I interrupted.

"Knew? Of course I knew. Later, of course, much later. I never inquired, as I told you, but I spotted him after he made his first big hit. The man who had hired him to do those articles bragged about it to me — said he'd given him his start, but allowed me some credit for establishing the connection. I blinked, but did n't let on I had n't known that Reynolds and my supposedly starving young author were one and the same person. By that time, of course, everybody was fully aware that Reynolds had emerged from heavily gilded circles of dulness. I don't know why I've never had it out with him before. I suppose I should n't have sailed in to-day if he had n't been so snippy about the boy of whom I was telling you. I could n't stand that."

"I'm afraid," I ventured to say, "that it won't do Reynolds any special good."

Orrington rose ponderously from his chair and spread his hands in a fantastic gesture of disclaim. "Who am I," he asked, "to teach ethics to a genius who is also a moralist — 'with perhaps a cosmic significance'? The devil tempted me, I tell you, and I fell, for the sake of a little fun and a little information. I've never known

Reynolds's side of the story. Lord, no, it won't do him any good. All the same, it will take him a week to explain to himself all over again just why he acted with perfect propriety in not acknowledging my little boost. I dare say his book may be a few days later on account of it, and I shall have to nurse Speedwell through an attack of the fidgets. A dreadful life, mine! No wonder the business man is tired. You ought to thank God on your knees every night that you haven't been sitting all day in a publisher's office."

He held out his hand very solemnly, and very solemnly waddled across the big room, nodding every now and then to acquaintances who smiled up at him as he passed.